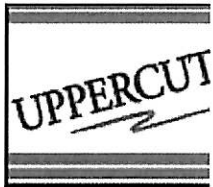


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B.C. students speak out about sexualized violence



By Amy Dove
Saanich News
Oct 11 2006

From Saanich schools to Bella Coola, the program works youth say



The message is always the same, no matter what the medium.

It has to be if hundreds of students are going to benefit from a program that addresses sexualized violence among youth. The program, called Project Respect, is making the rounds through local high schools and winning awards along the way.

"It's not an easy topic to deal with. They were Grade 11 students when they stepped up to do this and it really had an impact on the students," said Beth Danskin, teacher sponsor for the Mount Douglas group.



Amy Dove/Saanich News Source: McCreary Report 2000 Capital Region

Clockwise from top left: Ellen Chen, Veronica Stone, Pam Nelson, Julena Breel and Rinita Mazumder. The Grade 12 students at Mt. Douglas high school were honoured for their work in educating peers about sexual violence last month.

The 12 students from Mount Douglas and Lambrick Park high schools who underwent the first round of training were awarded the Youth Leadership award under the annual Crime Prevention awards in September. The award recognizes outstanding contributions to community safety and crime prevention.



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The recognition is important for the girls who organizer Susana Guardado can only describe as humble.

"I never got the sense that the young women who were involved realized how important their work was," said Guardado who organized the project through the Women's Sexual Assault Centre.

The program ran at Spectrum community school in the spring of 2005. Students there took a different approach, leaning more towards art than presentations.

"(It was a) fun colourfiul exciting way to do this," Guardado said of the banner they created. "It has to be really unique to each school because each school is so different."

The program format is more academic, allowing youth to openly talk about solutions without getting bogged down with personal issues. There is a focus on removing negative language and stereotypes that aid violence. The girls from Mount Doug all agreed the subject matter could be tricky with different audiences, but well worth it. The program gave insight into the scope of sexual assault, said student Julena Breeel.

Having peers teach peers, youth are better able to identify with role models, Gaurdado said. They bring a better understanding of the school's dynamics and realities than an adult could.

"Youth are themselves assets in our community. They have the capacity to be able to do this and it also recognizes their own experience," she said.

The program is not running in local schools this semester.

Guardado and staff were asked to present the training program to youth in Bella Coola.

With word slowly spreading about the program, Guardado hopes to launch it in a fourth school in the spring semester.

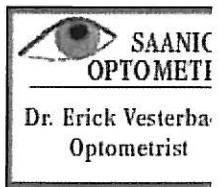
With their training complete the Mount Doug girls will be working with local youth groups from November through Febuary spreading the message about sexualized violence.

For more information about Project Respect go to www.yesmeansyes.com.

It happens here

It happens here

Studies show children in the CRD are not safe from sexual violence.

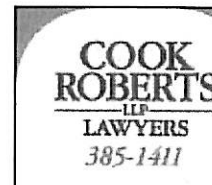


58 per cent of girls and 35 per cent of males say they experienced unwanted sexual comments, jokes or gestures directed at them.

36 per cent of girls and 17 per cent of males experienced unwanted sexual touching.

25 per cent of males, and 26 per cent of females aged 12 to 19 say they have had sexual intercourse.

15 per cent of girls in the region report being sexually abused.



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